DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 323 575 CS 507 265

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TITLE Commercials in the Classroom: A Content Analysis of "Channel One" Advertisements.
PUB DATE Aug 90
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (73rd, Minneapolis, MN, August 1-4, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Audience Awareness; *Broadcast Journalism; Cable Television; *Classroom Environment; Communication Research; Content Analysis; High Schools; *High School Students; News Reporting; *Television Commercials; Television Research
IDENTIFIERS *Channel One; *Television News

ABSTRACT

"Channel One" is a 12-minute daily TV news program designed specifically to be broadcast to high schools. A study examined critically the content of "Channel One" commercials to determine the values, themes, formats, and appeals used to pitch products to students, with special emphasis placed on the values used and promoted in the commercials. A coding schema was developed to conduct a content analysis. Results indicated, not surprisingly, that most of the commercials on "Channel One" were aimed at teenagers, emphasized positive aspects about products that teenagers use or focused on issues that teenagers are concerned about, featured young people having fun and enjoying advertised products, included rock music, and lasted 30 seconds. More interesting findings concern what the commercial messages collectively convey. Public service announcements comprised about 15% of the messages, a significantly higher percentage than that on most television stations in the United States. Well over 75% of the characters in the commercials were Caucasian; African-American, Hispanic, or Asian-dominant characters were almost non-existent. Product values seemed to tell students that products are worthy of purchase because they are effective and technologically advanced, rather than unique or ornamental. Personal values expressed focused primarily on leisure/pleasure, appearance/sexuality, and belonging. (Three tables of data are included; 54 references and 4 appendixes are attached.) (SR)

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Secondary Education Division

Commercials in the Classroom:

A Content Analysis of *Channel One* Advertisements

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CS507265

Presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Annual Convention, August, 1990

Commercials in the Classroom: A Content Analysis of *Channel One* Advertisements

On March 5, 1990, Whittle Communications began beaming a controversial 12-minute daily TV news program, *Channel One*, to more than 400 high schools in the United States(Wollenberg, 1990). So far, almost 3,000 schools in 34 states have signed three-year contracts to show the program to their students and Whittle Communications officials expect to have approximately 8,000 schools under contract by the end of 1990(School sign-ups, 1989; Wollenberg, 1990).

In exchange for agreeing to show *Channel One* to students every day, schools receive approximately $50,000 worth of television monitors, videocassette recorders, satellite dishes and installation/technical assistance(Hollenbert, 1989). The hardware and user-friendly assistance are provided free, but they do not come without cost. Each *Channel One* program contains two minutes of commercials for such products as jeans, tennis shoes, candy, snack foods, cosmetics, shampoos and acne creams(Hollenbert, 1989).

Few people have complained about the news content of *Channel One*. In fact, many believe it is critical that high school students develop a greater awareness and a better understanding of current events(Current events, 1990; N.Y. rejects, 1989). The controversy surrounding *Channel One* centers on its required, daily, two-minute dose of Madison Avenue's best efforts to persuade teenagers to buy and use products(Barry, 1989; Hollenbert,1989; Wollenberg, 1990).

Most of *Channel One*'s critics decry the "unwarranted commercial intrusion on captive audience members who are required by law to be in school"(N.Y. rejects, 1989; Wollenberg, 1990). Others worry about teachers and school administrators being put in the position of providing "de-facto" endorsements of commercial products and a loss of control over curriculum(Rudinow, 1989; State schools, 1989).

In light of the controversy and the apparent growing acceptance of *Channel One*, it seems important to examine critically the content of *Channel One* commercials to determine the values, themes, formats and appeals used to pitch products to students. This study was designed to do just that, but special emphasis was placed on the values used and promoted in the commercials.

Background of *Channel One*

The man behind *Channel One*, Chris Whittle, believes his project is an example of "enlighted partnership between the business community and the educational community"(Goodman, 1989). He says most secondary schools simply do not have the money to buy all of the hardware and software they need to provide quality educational experiences for their students, so private enterprise needs to step in and help out(Goodman, 1989; Hollenbert; 1989).

The *Channel One* concept and the format for the program were tested for five weeks at six secondary schools during March and April, 1989. Each program consisted of mostly short national and international news and feature stories plus two minutes of commercials. The stories were

similiar to those aired by local and network news departments. *Channel One* also aired longer-format feature reports and series segments dealing with such topics as life in the Soviet Union and environmental awareness.

The fast-paced program was hosted by young, attractive news readers. All the news and feature reporters were young, too. State-of-the-art graphics were used to enhance the visual impact of stories and eye-catching "fast facts" and "pop quizzes" were used to heighten interest.

According to the business manager for *Channel One*, Holly Shockley(1990), the program's format will remain relatively unchanged for the foreseeable future. Whittle Communications has worked out an arrangement with *Visnews*, the world's largest supplier of international news, to acquire material for broadcast(Channel One, 1990). *Visnews* is owned by three respected news organizations, NBC, the BBC and Reuters. Under the agreement, *Channel One* will have access to domestic material developed by NBC News, *Visnews'* international coverage and *Visnews'* archives. In addition, *Visnews* crews will be available for special assignments under the direction of *Channel One* producers.

To provide the $50,000 worth of telecommunications equipment needed at each *Channel One* school, Whittle Communications has signed a $150 million contract with Philips Consumer Electronics(Gelman, 1989). Experts predict that when the cost of producing the content is factored in, it will cost Whittle Communications about $2 million per week to beam *Channel One* to the target goal of 8,000 high schools(Gelman, 1989). Predicted audience size for *Channel One* is about seven million teenagers(Reilly, 1989a; Tate, 1989). If that prediction becomes a reality, Channel One would be reaching arguably the largest captive teenage TV audience ever(Barry, 1989; Reilly, 1989a).

As of February, 1990, Whittle Communications had sold more than $200 million in three-year advertising contracts for *Channel One*(Classroom news, 1990). Each 30-second commercial on *Channel One* costs an advertiser $150,000 and Whittle officials expect to earn at least $65 million from first-year sales(Classroom news, 1990, Wollenberg, 1990).

Channel One is not without competitors. Ted Turner has introduced *CNN Newsroom*, a 15-minute daily, commercial-free newscast produced for teenagers(Halonen, 1989; Sterman, 1989; Turner school, 1989). Turner has given permission to schools to tape the program which is aired at 3:45 a.m. for replaying in classrooms(Turner to, 1989).

Tele-Communications, Inc.(TCI), the largest cable operator in the United States, has put together a free package of educationally-oriented programming, including *CNN Newsroom*, and plans to offer the package to more than 5,000 public and private high schools via cable TV and satellite dishes(TCI offering, 1989). The package features segments produced by C-Span, Arts & Entertainment, Black Entertainment Television, the Weather Channel, the Discovery Channel's *Assignment Discovery* and the Learning Channel's *Electronic Library*(TCI offering, 1989). Some of the TCI programming contains commercials, but teachers are given permission to eliminate ads before showing programs to students(TCI offering, 1989).

WLWT-TV, the NBC affiliate in Cincinnati, has teamed with Warner Cable to provide daily five-minute segments of commercial-free local news for high school students in the Cincinnati area(Clayton, 1989). The program is produced at about midnight, microwaved to high schools, taped and shown during the regular school day in social science classes(Clayton, 1989). Students are involved in the newsgathering, editing and production for the program(Clayton, 1989).

Channel One Advertising Standards

Whittle Communications has developed a set of standards to guide its *Channel One* advertising(Development of, 1990). Concerns associated with values dominate the document, beginning with the "policy statement."

It is the policy of *Channel One* to present advertising which is truthful and tasteful and not misleading or deceptive. *Channel One* recognizes that it has a special responsibility to its teen-age audience because of its age and the educational environment in which the programming is viewed. Careful attention will be given to all guidelines to assure that practices and behavior which are inconsistent with the learning environment, as well as the community at large, will be avoided in commercial programming(Development of, 1990).

The guidelines include the following sections:

A. ADVERTISING/PROGRAMMING DISTINCTION

Any creative technique that may confuse the viewer by blurring the distinction between programs and commercials is unacceptable.

B. AUDIO/VISUAL MISREPRESENTATION

Advertisements will avoid audio and video techniques that in any way misrepresent, distort, exaggerate or over-glamorize their attributes or functions.

C. COMMUNITY SENSIBILITIES

Advertising which belittles any group based on its social, racial, ethnic or religious traits or any person because of his age, sex, or handicaps is unacceptable.

D.COMPARATIVE ADVERTISING

Comparative advertising may not distort or exaggerate differences between competitive products or services or otherwise create a false, deceptive or misleading impression.

E. CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Advertising which takes a position on a controversial issue of public importance is unacceptable. A controversial issue of public importance is defined as one which involves matters having significant impact on society or its institutions, and as to which there is a current public debate with substantial segments of the community taking opposing positions.

F. CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

Advertising which promotes or accepts violence, crime or obscenity is unacceptable. Advertising may not contain the portrayal of specific detailed techniques involved in the commission of crimes, the use of weapons, the avoiding of detection, nor any other forms of anti-social behavior.

G. DRAMATIZATIONS, REENACTMENTS AND SIMULATIONS

A commercial which utilizes a dramatization, reenactment or simulation must accurately depict the product, service or event involved.

H. ENDORSEMENTS

Endorsements must reflect the honest opinions, beliefs, findings or experience of the endorser. Endorsements may not contain any claims which could not be substantiated if made directly by the advertiser.

I. SAFETY

Advertisements and products advertised must be consistent with generally recognized safety standards. All advertising which disregards normal safety precautions is unacceptable.

J. SUBLIMINAL PERCEPTION

Any advertising utilizing the technique of "subliminal perception" or any similar technique is unacceptable.

In the advertising standards for *Channel One*, Whittle Communications encourages advertisers to develop commercials designed specifically for *Channel One* and lists some "proactive" responsibilities for advertisers.

Although the ultimate responsibility of developing advertising rests with the individual sponsors, *Channel One* will encourage the development of specific messages that accomplish the following objectives:

A. Includes a balanced representation of individuals from a variety of social, racial, ethnic or gender groups.

B. Provides positive role models for all members of the viewing audience.

C. Includes and portrays individuals with physical and mental impairments.

D. Places an emphasis on the importance of education and remaining in school.

E. Communicates strong messages against all forms of anti-social behavior, including drug use, violence, prejudice, etc.

Reactions to *Channel One*

Reactions to the *Channel One* concept and its five-week test have been understandably mixed. Positive reactions have included the following:

1. Most of the students and teachers who took part in the test liked *Channel One*(Barry, 1989; Chase, 1989; Hollenbert, 1989; Reilly, 1989a; State schools,1989).

2. The current events knowledge of students increased after watching *Channel One*(Barry, 1989; Chase, 1989; N.Y. rejects, 1989; State schools, 1989).

3. Many students reported that *Channel One* prompted them to be more active consumers of other forms of mass media(State schools, 1989).

4. Many students reported that *Channel One* helped them gain a better understanding of the world and helped them in some of their other academic subjects(Chase, 1989; State schools, 1989).

5. *Channel One* provides material that can be used in classroom discussions about the "pyschology of advertising, decision-making and the manipulativeness of advertising"(Chase, 1989; Reilly, 1989a).

6. Students who viewed *Channel One* did not pay too much attention to the commercials and/or the commercials were really no different from ones they had seen many times before(Chase, 1989; Reilly, 1989a).

7. Many schools cannot afford to purchase telecommunications equipment--only 3% of schools have satellite dishes and only 10% of classrooms have television sets(Landro, 1989)--so *Channel One* makes it possible for schools to improve educational opportunities for their students(Barry, 1989, Landro, 1989). With written approval, the equipment provided by Whittle Communications can be used by schools to show other commercial and non-commercial programming(Rukeyser, 1989/90; Shockley, 1990). Some educators have said that being forced to view commercials seems a small price to pay for the benefits obtained(Hollenbert, 1989).

Negative reactions to *Channel One* have included the following:

1. The telecommunications equipment provided to schools by Whittle Communications comes with several contractual limitations(Barry, 1989; N.Y. rejects, 1989, Rudinow, 1989/90; Rukeyser, 1989/90; Shockley, 1990). The equipment must be returned when a contract is terminated and the satellite dish provided to schools cannot be rotated to receive any programs other than those transmitted by the *Channel One* system.

2. Several major educational organizations, including the National Parent-Teacher Association and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, oppose *Channel One*, because they believe business should be barred from making sales pitches in classrooms(Goodman, 1989; Hollenbert, 1989; Reilly, 1989a; Reilly, 1989b; School sign-ups, 1989; State schools, 1989; Wollenberg, 1990).

3. Several states, including New York, California, Massachusetts, Washington and North Carolina, have banned *Channel One*, because leading educators in those states believe that force-feeding students a steady diet of advertising in the classrom is an unwarranted intrustion that corrupts the school day(N.Y. rejects, 1989; Reilly, 1989a; Wollenberg, 1990).

4. Educators and critics complain that schools should not become commercial turf, providing platforms for pitching products and offering students' minds for sale(Goodman, 1989; Halonen, 1989; Rudinow, 1989/90; School sign-ups, 1989; State schools, 1989).

5. Educators and critics believe that showing *Channel One* results in a loss of control over curriculum matters and that the airing of commercials is an inappropriate use of class time(Rudinow, 1989/90; State schools, 1989; Sterman, 1989; Tate, 1989). The time devoted to watching *Channel One* for a year has been estimated to equal six full, classroom days, including one day devoted to watching ads(State schools, 1989).

6. Some critics are troubled by what they perceive to be a MTV, video-game approach to the news on *Channel One*(Tate, 1989) They worry that a bad message might be sent to students: news is palatable only when it comes in tiny bits, accompanied by flashy graphics and rock music(Tate, 1989).

7. Educators and critics are concerned that *Channel One* might air inappropriate commercials and/or promote inappropriate values(Barry, 1989; Chase, 1989; Reilly, 1989a; 'Sexually suggestive,' 1989). During the test run, Whittle Communications pulled one ad for Levi's jeans because some school officials and students found the ad "sexually suggestive('Sexually suggestive,' 1989). Complaints also were lodged about a Clearasil ad that showed a wall with graffiti on it(Chase, 1989). A marketing teacher at one of the test schools expressed concern over the commercials for cosmetics because he said when most high school girls are late for class, they use the need to apply makeup as their excuse(Reilly, 1989a).

Clearly, most of the criticism associated with *Channel One* springs from the presence of commercials and the messages that might be sent by such commercials; however, despite the criticism and despite the commercial-free nature of similar news programming offered by competitors, Whittle Communications has no plans to eliminate advertisements from its program(Shockley, 1990). In fact, the company prides itself on creating innovative advertising vehicles--"target-specific media"--and advertising concepts--"single-sponsor media"(Rudinow, 1989/90). Besides, for an entrepeneur like Chris Whittle, the teenage market has been and promises to continue to be a lucrative one(Classroom news, 1990; Rudinow, 1989/90).

Advertising and Young People

The youth market obviously appeals to major advertisers. The audience represents opportunities for marketers of fast food, clothing, records, cosmetics and other discretionary goods and services. Purchases by young people are not limited to low-ticket items, however. At least 86% of teenagers own cameras, 35% own TV sets and 12% own personal computers(Walsh, 1983). It is estimated that teenagers spend $34 billion a year and influence another $44 billion in sales(Donaton, 1988).

The number of commercial messages targeted at this market suggest that it is a profitable one for advertisers. By the time the average adolescent graduates from high school, he or she will have watched nearly 900,000 television commercials(Wolfe, 1986). This, of course, is in addition to newspaper, magazine and radio advertisements, billboards, point-of-purchase displays and advertisements in movie theaters. According to the research firm of Yankelovich Clancy Schulman, such advertising does apear to have an impact on the product selections of minors--25% noted that advertising helped them "a lot" in deciding which clothes, breakfast cereals, fast foods and soft drinks to buy(Lowy, 1988).

Research on advertising and the youth market has focused primarily on preschool or grade school children. The bulk of this literature falls into the following broad categories:

(1)The age at which children develop the ability to distinguish programming and commercials. Robertson and Rossiter(1974), found that a child's age was the most important factor that influenced his/her ability to distinguish between programming and commercials. First graders were found to be less capable than older children in making the distinction. Stephens and Stutts(1982) found that children aged three, four and five may respond to the perceptual cues shown on television, but do not truly understand the difference between programs and commercials.

(2)The cognitive development of children and the extent to which they understand the nature of commercials. Rubin(1974) used Piaget's "Stages of Cognitive Development" and found that children in Stage II (usually about first grade) did not assimilate as much information nor understand the purpose of advertisements as did children who were older and in a later stage of cognitive development. Butter, Popovich, Stackhouse and Ganner(1981) found that 90% of preschool children did not understand the reason why advertisements were presented on television. Stutts, Vance and Hudelson(1981) noted that although 78% of three, five and seven year old children claim to know what a commercial is, only the seven year olds could adequately define the concept.

(3)The extent to which children influence the purchase of various products and the yielding of parents to the requests of children. Ward and Wackman(1972) examined children aged 5-12 and found that purchase influence attempts decreased as children became older, but mothers were more likely to yield to purchase requests as children increased in age. Wiman(1983) found that mothers who interact frequently with their children received significantly more purchase requests than did mothers who interacted on a less frequent basis.

The appropriateness of advertising directed toward children and teenagers is a controversial subject that has stirred significant debate long before Whittle Communications and *Channel One*. Beyond understanding whether a child begins to differentiate between program and commercials at age four or six, or the frequency of requests made by a child to purchase advertised products, is the question of what values are being communicated to this audience via commercial messages.

Critics have argued that commercial messages directed toward children "create materialism, stifle creativity, create conflict between parent and child and hinder the development of moral and ethical values"(Hite and Eck, 1987). Wolfe(1988) suggests:

> "Commercials gladly tell youth what to value in society. Everything is measured in terms of money. Intangibles with no dollar sign, including values like integrity, trust and sincerity must not be worth much. A material world shows little respect for voluntarism, altruism or sacrifice."

Values in Advertising

In order to explore the values manifest in advertising messages directed toward children in general, and in particular those targeted at students in the classroom, it is necessary to examine the broader issue of values and consumer behavior. A value may be defined as "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end state of existence is personally and socially preferable to an opposite

or converse mode of conduct or end state of existence. A value system is an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end states of existence along a continuum of relative importance"(Rokeach, 1975).

The fundamental significance of values in marketing has only recently been studied in a systematic way(Kahle, 1985). Articles on values and consumer behavior that have appeared in scholarly journals reinforce the idea that values may indeed be one of the most powerful explanations of, and influences on, consumer behavior(Clawson and Winson, 1978).

Researchers have employed a variety of methodologies, although the Rokeach Value Survey(1968, 1973), has been the most popular. The Rokeach Value Survey consists of two sets of values, 18 instrumental values and 18 terminal values. Instrumental values relate to modes of conduct and represent single beliefs which are socially and personally preferable in all situations with respect to all objects. Terminal values are single beliefs that some end state of existence is socially and personally worth striving for. ***SEE Appendix A***

Kahle(1983) developed classifications for individuals according to which values they identified as most important. The values were culled from Rokeach's list of values, Maslow's(1954) hierarchy of needs and several more contemporary research studies. Kahle's nine values were: self-respect, security, warm relationships, sense of accomplishment, self-fulfillment, being well-respected, sense of belonging, fun and enjoyment in life and excitement. Kahle's methodology has become known as the List of Values(LOV).

The Values and Life Styles(VALS) methodology was developed at SRI International by Mitchell(1983). The methodology, also based on Maslow's work, as well as the concept of social character(Riesman, Glazer and Denny, 1950)), offers a comprehensive view of the U.S. population broken down into nine different "values and life style" categories. Via statistical and theoretical means, 34 questions were identified as useful in classifying individuals as survivors, sustainers, belongers, emulators, achievers, I-am-me, experimental, societally conscious and integrated.

Pollay(1983a) suggests that studying values in advertising is critical even though values can be obtained from and demonstrated in a variety of ways:

> "While there are many institutions that carry out value transmission, such as the family, church, military, courts, universities, etc., there is good reason to pay particularly close attention to advertising as a carrier of cultural values. Unlike the other institutions, advertising is the only institution that plays a major role in the mass media, thereby giving it a far more universal influence."

Kahle(1983) notes that the application of values to advertising may be the most important area of application of values research in marketing.

> "Social values may be among the major influences on human behavior, and advertisements that take this notion into account may be among the most effective. Further, value-linked advertisements may animate affect, creating an affective response closer to the value-induced affect than to the product or advertisement

without the value link. To the extent that affective advertisements are more influential than bland ads, values may be a mechanism to explore when trying to understand sources of affect."

Empirical investigations of the value content of commercial messages have been quite limited. Pollay(1983a) notes that "even though advertising is a particularly persuasive proponent of a specific value system, a methodology for measuring the values manifest in advertising has not existed."

To remedy the situation, Pollay developed a content analytic methodology synthesizing the work of Rokeach, Fowles(1976), White(1951) and others. The resultant "inventory of values" includes the following: belonging, cheapness, community, family, health, leisure, magic, maturity, mildness, modern, natural, neat, ornamental, popular, practical, pride, productivity, sexy, status, technological, traditional, unique, wild, wisdom and youth. ***SEE Appendix B***

With regard to just how these values are manifest in advertising, Pollay(1983a)notes: "Advertising works to draw attention to values inherent in the product, to point to values that may be realized by the purchaser via consumption of the product, and at times invokes values so that they become cognitively associated with the product or brand."

Pollay(1983b) initially used his methodology to identify and determine the distribution of values manifest in print advertising between 1900-1980, but his inventory is equally appropriate for values manifest in broadcast advertising. The inventory makes it possible to conduct more objective studies of the values content of commercial messages, an area long dominated by subjective judgments and contentions.

Research Questions

1. What products and services are advertised on *Channel One*?
2. What are the elements and structure of the commercials on *Channel One*?
3. What formats are used to sell products/services on *Channel One*?
4. What appeals are used to sell products/services on *Channel One*?
5. What values are contained in the commercials on *Channel One*?
6. What are the dominant themes contained in the commercials on *Channel One*?

Methods

The literature review for this study focused on *Channel One* and advertising values research. After completing the literature review and viewing five, randomly selected *Channel One* programs from the five-week test run, the authors developed a coding schema for conducting a content analysis of the commercials aired on *Channel One*. The unit of analysis was each distinct commercial for a product or service.

Variables Coded

For each commercial, the following variables were coded:

1. Type of commercial--standard or public service announcement(PSA)
2. Type of product or service--jeans, candy, cosmetics, etc.
3. Presence of a dominant character(age, sex, race and number)
4. Presence of secondary characters(age, sex, race and number)
5. Main activity shown--dating, hanging out, school, sports, etc.
6. Type of music employed
7. Length
8. Audience targeted--youth or general
9. Gender targeted--male, female, mixed
10. Format--vignette, testimonial, dramatization, etc.
11. Appeals--rational, emotional, sex, fear, humor, etc.
12. Values promoted--product values and personal values
13. Dominant themes

Commercial Formats

The manner in which a selling message is presented on television is known in the industry as the "commercial format." The formats used in this study were identified by Berkman and Gilson(1987): vignettes, stand-ups, song and dance, slice-of-life, testimonials, dramatizations, demonstrations, documentary and animation. ***SEE Appendix C***

Commercial Appeals

An appeal in a commercial is "a creative attempt to motivate consumers toward some form of activity or to influence attitudes toward a product or service"(Berkman and Gilson, 1987). The appeals used in this study were identified by Berkman and Gilson(1987): rational, emotional, positive, negative, humor, fear, sex and patriotism. ***SEE Appendix D***

Values

The "inventory of values" developed by Pollay was used to determine the values being communicated to students in *Channel One* commercials. Operational definitions of Pollay's(1983a) values are included in Appendix Two. In some instances, to facilitate coding, some of Pollay's categories were collapsed. For example, Pollay distinguishes between "nurturance" and "succorance." This study combined the two values into a category labeled "love/affection."

An additional modification was distinguishing between independence and security within Pollay's broader value of "pride." The authors used the value "safety/security" to refer to security from external threats, carefulness, caution, stability, absence of hazards, potential injury or other risks. "Independence" was defined as self-sufficiency, self-reliance, autonomy, originality and the desire to be unconventional or non-conformist.

The authors also distinguished between values predominately related to product characteristics(effective, ornamental, economical, unique, popular, traditional, modern,

technological, magic and natural) and values predominately related to individuals(wisdom, productivity, leisure/pleasure, maturity, youthfulness, safety/security, adventure, appearance/sexuality, status/self-esteem, independence, belonging, family, community, health, cleanliness and love/affection.

Commercials can contain several values, of course, but one value is usually dominant. Dominant values are those that are key elements of the advertisement's "gestalt" or first impression(Pollay, 1983a). Secondary values are those that support the dominant value. In this study, both dominant and secondary values were coded as being present.

Themes

Dominant themes were defined as the underlying concepts and/or messages about lifestyles that a commercial attempted to convey: be materialistic, be altruistic, be popular/have friends, have fun/have pleasure, be cool, be fit/healthy, buck the establishment, be safe/secure, be attractive, be mature and reach your potential(self-actualization). The dominant themes for each commercial were determined after the authors analyzed the product and personal values evidenced in each commercial.

Sample and Coding Techniques

Each commercial(N=99) aired on *Channel One* during the test-run was content analyzed. Videotapes of *Channel One* programs were obtained from Whittle Communications.

The authors coded the commercials together. It was felt that since coding of values is such an inherently judgmental endeavor, the best data would result from a consensus rather than a compilation of individual coder judgments. Any perceived differences regarding displayed values were discussed and conflicts were resolved. The reported data reflects the collective judgment of the authors.

In an effort to determine the reliability of coding and coding categories, 10% of the distinct commercials were coded separately. Overall, agreement was 96% for the 240 variables(Scott, 1955).

Qualitative Data

The authors also conducted interviews with staffers from Whittle Communications and students, teachers and administrators at all six *Channel One* "test" schools. One of the authors visited a test school and observed a *Channel One* viewing session.

Findings

Types/Products

About 86% of the commercials aired on *Channel One* during the five-week test run were advertisements for products. The other 14% could be classified as "public service announcements(PSAs)." Commercials for Levi's jeans were the most common(14%), followed by commercials for candy(10%), shampoo(9%), makeup(8%) and gum(8%). ***SEE Table 1*** The most common PSAs dealt with the dangers of drug use(6%).

Elements/Structure

About 46% of the commercials featured a dominant character and about 80% of such commercials featured a single dominant character. Such characters were most often males, but the difference was small--52% to 48%. Dominant characters were most often caucasian(91%) and under 25 years old(75%).

About 84% of the commercials featured secondary characters. Such characters were also young(65% under 20), caucasian(80%), and a good mix of males and females(59% mixed, 27% males, 24% females). On average, about eight characters appeared in each commercial.

The primary activity depicted in *Channel One* commercials was "hanging out"(29%), sports(21%) or various combinations of "fun, interesting and exciting" things to do(23%). ***SEE Table 2*** About 95% of the commercials included background music. Rock(35%) was the most common type of music, followed by jazz(19%), theme music(17%) and rhythm and blues(14%).

About 63% of the commercials clearly were targeted at teenagers. About 67% were aimed at both boys and girls, but 20% were aimed just at boys and 13% were aimed just at girls. About 87% of the commercials ran 30 seconds. About 10% ran 15 seconds and 3% ran 60 seconds.

Formats/Appeals

A vignette format was the most often used(23%), followed by song and dance(19%), slice-of-life(17%), dramatization(14%), product demonstration(14%) and testimonial(12%). For about 70% of the commercials, positive appeals dominated. Rational appeals(16%) and emotional appeals(11%) were also regularly employed. Emotional appeals were the most commonly used secondary appeals(40%), followed by fear(17%), positive(17%), sex(12%) and humor(11%).

Values

The most often touted product value in *Channel One* commercials was effectiveness(90%). The technological(31%), modern(19%), popular(13%) and natural(9%) values of products also were touted reasonably often. ***SEE Table 3*** The most often demonstrated personal value was leisure/pleasure(55%), followed by appearance/sexuality(51%), belonging(32%), independence(25%), wisdom(22%), productivity(22%) and status/esteem(21%).

Themes

Three major themes dominated the commercials on *Channel One*. "Be popular/have friends"(48%) was the most frequent, followed by "be attractive"(46%) and "have fun/have pleasure"(38%). "Be cool"(23%), "be fit/be healthy"(23%) and "self-actualization"(18%) were reasonably popular, too.

Discussion

It was not too suprising to discover that most of the commercials on *Channel One* were aimed at teenagers, emphasized positive aspects about products that teenagers use or focused on issues teenagers are concerned about, featured young people having fun and enjoying advertised products, included rock music and lasted 30 seconds. Such findings were intuitively expected.

The more interesting and somewhat more surprising findings deal with the questions associated with what the commercial messages on *Channel One* collectively convey to students. It is important to note that about 15% of the commercial messages were not for a product or service, but were instead public service announcements. This percentage is significantly higher than the percentage of PSAs aired on most television stations in the United States(Smith, 1985). The frequency of PSAs on *Channel One* suggests that students are not simply being encouraged to buy products, but are also being challenged to consider such issues as drug abuse, traffic safety and their career goals.

On a less positive note, it appears that the advertisers on *Channel One* are not making a concerted effort to present a racial mix of characters within advertisements. African-American, Hispanic or Asian dominant characters were almost non-existent. Even in commercials that employed a reasonably large cast of characters, well over 75% of the characters are still caucasian. Such racially disproportionate protrayals may be particularly problematic for schools where the student population is racially mixed.

The product values communicated in *Channel One* commercials seem to tell students that products are worthy of purchase because they are effective and technologically advanced, rather than because they happen to be unique or ornamental. Advertising content which highlights the fact that a product is durable, efficient and convenient, or that is engineered or constructed in a particular way may be seen as providing useful product information, affording the student the opportunity to evaluate the attributes of different product offerings. It can be argued that such messages serve as a valid information resource, teaching students the consumption skills necessary to function in the consumer marketplace.

At first glance, the absence of any specific references to "economical" values associated with a product seemed somewhat suprising. After some reflection, though, the lack of references to the cost of items was understandable. Since the bulk of the products advertised on *Channel One* were relatively low-ticket items--candy, shampoo, cosmetics--there was no great need to tout the inexpensiveness of products. In such cases, cost is usually not a major concern for most students.

The personal values expressed in the commercial messages on *Channel One* focus primarily on leisure/pleasure, appearance/sexuality and belonging. Values related to maturity, the community or the family receive limited attention. This disparity is not too surprising based on what most teenagers seem to find important. It is interesting to note, however, that even though the "wisdom" value was narrowly defined for this study, it still was present in almost 25% of the commercials. It seems appropriate that commercials in classrooms stress the importance of knowledge, studying and academic achievement. There was, of course, the subtle message of "BE SMART, BE WISE, BUY THIS PRODUCT, in all of the commercials for products, but it was encouraging to note a reasonable attempt to include the more narrowly defined value of wisdom in at least some of the commercials.

The themes stressed in *Channel One* commercials reflect typical concerns of teenagers, too. Being popular, having friends, having fun, being attractive, being healthy and being "cool" are all

important to teenagers, so one would expect to discover such concerns dominating *Channel One* commercials. What was somewhat surprising was the lack of any blatant examples of materialism themes. The desirability of possessing "cool" shoes and jeans was implied, of course, but such themes were not dominant in any of the commercials. Instead, products were shown, not so much as desirable ends in themselves, but as means to achieve desired states of mind or states of existence.

The debate concerning the ethics of advertising in the classroom is likely to continue for some time. With almost 3,000 schools in 34 states under contract with Whittle Communications, *Channel One* and commercials in the classroom are issues that certainly merit further study.

One school of thought is that advertising has no place in the classroom and exposing students to commercial messages corrupts curricular integrity. The other school of thought looks at advertising in the classroom as serving both an information function by enhancing the development of necessary consumption-decision skills and a means to provide schools with necessary equipment and resources to enhance educational opportunities for students. This investigation did not attempt to resolve the debate. Instead, it simply attempted to outline objectively the characteristics of the commercial messages aired on *Channel One*.

More study is needed, of course, in connection with the critical question of whether advertisers shape or reflect values. It is a traditional question in advertising; however, if advertising messages have even a limited potential to convey social messages that may affect social values, the question still needs to be addressed. The greater our knowledge concerning advertising's impact on the value systems of young people, the greater likelihood that the advertising community, educators, students and parents will be able to respond intelligently to the issue of commercials in the classroom.

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Table 1

Frequency of Product Advertising on *Channel One*

PRODUCT	NUMBER OF AIRINGS
Jeans	14
Candy	10
Shampoo	9
Makeup	8
Gum	8
Razor	6
Breath mints	6
Drug PSA	6
Acne cream	5
Traffic safety PSA	5
Deodorant	4
Shoes(athletic)	4
Corn chips	3
Catsup	3
Movie promotion(*Ghostbusters II*)	3
Motivational PSA	3
Cough drops	2

Table 2

Frequency of Activity Depicted in *Channel One* Commercials

ACTIVITY	Number of Depictions
"Hanging Out"	29
Combinations	23
Sports	21
Allegory	8
School	7
Dating	5
Family	4
Using product	2

Table 3

Frequency of Values/Themes in *Channel One* Commercials in Percent

Product Values	
Effective	90
Technological	31
Modern	19
Popular	13
Natural	9
Magic	3
Unique	2
Ornamental	2
Traditional	0
Economical	0
Personal Values	
Leisure/Pleasure	55
Appearance/Sexuality	51
Belonging	32
Independence	25
Wisdom	22
Productivity	22
Status/Self-Esteem	21
Health	18
Cleanliness	18
Adventure	13
Family	9
Youthfulness	8
Maturity	8
Safety/Security	7
Love/Affection	3
Community	2
Dominant Themes	
Be Popular/Have Friends	48
Be Attractive	46
Have Fun/Have Pleasure	38
Be Cool	23
Be Fit/Be Healthy	23
Self-Actualization	18
Buck Establishment	9
Be Safe/Be Secure	8
Be Mature	7
Be Altruistic	2
Be Materialistic	0

Appendix A

Instrumental Values	Terminal Values
Ambitious	A comfortable life
Broadminded	An exciting life
Capable	A sense of accomplishment
Cheerful	A world at peace
Clean	A world of beauty
Courageous	Equality
Forgiving	Family security
Helpful	Freedom
Honest	Happiness
Imaginative	Inner harmony
Independent	Mature love
Intellectual	National security
Logical	Pleasure
Loving	Salvation
Obedient	Self-respect
Polite	Social recognition
Responsible	True friendship
Self-controlled	Wisdom

Appendix B

Belonging: to be accepted; to conform to social customs; to give gifts of things, help, love and support(nurturance); to receive expressions of love and to feel deserving(succorance).

Cheapness: economical, a good value.

Community: public spiritedness; relating to community, state or national publics; patriotism.

Family: nurturance within the family, being at home, companionship of siblings.

Health: fitness, to be active, free from disease.

Leisure: to be at ease, to have fun, to enjoy games.

Magic: miracles, to astonish.

Maturity: being adult, wisdom.

Mildness: security from external threats, tamed, humane, fair, ethical, honest, modesty.

Modern: contemporary, advanced, improved.

Natural: purity of product, references to elements of nature.

Neat: orderly, precise, clean, sweet-smelling.

Ornamental: beautiful, styled, decorative.

Popular: well-known, standard, common.

Practical: effective, functional, tasty, comfortable, durable, time-saving.

Pride: independence, unconventional, confident, self-respect, self-esteem.

Productivity: achievement, ambition, self-development, contributing.

Sexy: being socially desirable, being pretty/handsome, being vain, embracing between lovers.

Status: envy, prestige, power, trend-setting, wealth.

Technological: engineered, formulated, resulting from science, containing secret ingredients.

Traditional: classic, time-honored, nostalgic.

Unique: rare, hand-crafted, unusual, exclusive.

Wildness: bold, daring, courageous, thrilling, uninhibited.

Wisdom: knowledge, expertise, judgment, awareness.

Youth: being young, immature, rejuvenated.

Appendix C

Vignette: series of situations.

Stand-Up: one presenter delivers selling message.

Song and Dance: infectious music, happy feelings, having fun.

Slice-of-Life: short play usually featuring a consumer problem.

Testimonial: user of product discusses product.

Dramatization: exaggerating or personifying selling feature of product.

Demonstration: show how product is and/or can be used.

Documentary: case history of unusual or interesting use of product.

Animation: cartoons, computer graphics.

Appendix D

Rational: logical, reasonable, utility-oriented.

Emotional: appealing to psychological needs--to be loved, needed, regarded as successful.

Positive: upbeat, stressing advantages.

Negative: using problems, what product will not do.

Humor: amusing, funny, satire, joking.

Fear: trying to frighten, terrify.

Sex: sexuality, modified nudity, caressing, kissing, lusting.

Patriotic: nationalism; pride in community, state, country; duty to country.